

In an article published in the Dayton Daily News, one veteran who served in Thailand said his barracks were along the perimeter, and at the time of the interview, he still hadn't received benefits for his VA claim.

The arbitrary limits on consideration of a veteran's claim to toxic exposure are simply wrong. These misguided technicalities and bureaucratic hurdles need to be addressed. Our bill would eliminate the unreasonable burden placed on veterans to prove toxic exposure.

No veteran should be denied benefits due to redtape. These Americans who served our country, and to this day are paying a high price as a result, have been carelessly hindered by the current limitations on the presumption of toxic exposure to Agent Orange, but they aren't forgotten. We have an obligation to ensure they get the benefits they are due, and I am committed to supporting their cause.

I appreciate the determination and tireless efforts of Mr. Rhodes. He said this legislation gives him some hope, but he won't be proud of his work until the bill is passed.

I encourage my colleagues to support our legislation. I look forward to working with members of the Senate VA Committee to eliminate the barriers that prevent veterans from getting the care and resources they have earned.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from Oregon.

#### NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senate will soon vote on the nomination of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. Moving this nomination forward required an additional procedural step and more floor debate than others, so I will make just a few quick points this afternoon.

First, in our lifetime, America has never faced a greater public health challenge than the pandemic we face today. The Department of Health and Human Services is our point Agency, the leading Agency to coordinate the effort to end the pandemic as soon as possible. Right now, for example, it is coordinating the distribution of vaccines. It is working to get PPE, the critical protective equipment, into the hands of nurses and doctors and all those providers who desperately need more of it. The Department supports rural hospitals to keep them afloat so that rural patients have access to care.

The Department's work includes the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, the National Guard, all 50 States and the District of Columbia, as well as private healthcare systems, doctors, and many individuals across the country.

The American people, we all know, are ready for this pandemic to end. They certainly understand that having a person to coordinate the critical efforts of the Department of Health and

Human Services confirmed and on the job is part of that effort. There simply is no argument for delaying this confirmation any longer.

Attorney General Becerra has the right leadership experience and the right health policy experience to succeed in this critical job. He currently heads the Nation's second largest department of justice. He is in charge of a billion-dollar budget and more than 4,000 employees. He is the top law enforcement official in what would be the fifth largest economy in the world.

In terms of health policy, which is in the area I try to specialize in, I can tell Senators that Xavier Becerra has spent years and years on these issues at the Ways and Means Committee, the key committee in the other body with jurisdiction over healthcare. He has been through major policy debates, including the Affordable Care Act. As California's attorney general, he defended the act in court.

When the pandemic hit, he fought to protect the health and well-being of all Californians, particularly nurses and doctors and those workers who found themselves in harm's way.

Attorney General Becerra has the health policy savvy and the leadership savvy and the experience in both areas to run this Department, no question about it.

Attorney General Becerra made it clear to members of the Finance Committee that he will follow the law. Quaint idea. He said it again and again in response to a barrage of questions. He is going to be accessible to Senators. He is going to work to find common ground on key healthcare issues. I was glad he said it because that is heavy lifting. Most of the time, that is really all you can ask of nominees of the other party.

Healthcare is oftentimes a divisive subject. I think every Senator understands that. It is particularly true when it comes to women's healthcare. But it is clear to me that Attorney General Becerra wants to bring the two sides together. That is a great place to start after the last 4 years of knock-down, drag-out battles over healthcare issues that clearly took America in the wrong direction.

I am going to close with just one thought about why this position is so important. I don't know of any prospect more unifying among Americans than ending the pandemic and getting life back to normal as quickly as possible. Parents want their kids back in school. Grandparents want to hug their grandkids. Everybody wants to feel safe and get out in their communities.

Getting our country to that point is the essence of what this job is all about. Heading the Department of Health and Human Services focuses exactly on those things people want to have the country come together on. But we need to come together to beat the pandemic, and the Department needs its leader confirmed and on the job now.

I was pleased that there was bipartisan support for discharging Attorney General Becerra's nomination from the Finance Committee. I hope the Senate gives his nomination bipartisan support once again when it is time to vote on his confirmation.

I look forward to working with him in the months and years to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

#### NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I oppose the confirmation of California Attorney General Becerra to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Our future HHS Secretary will be at the helm of rebuilding our country toward normalcy and preparing to address the weaknesses in our healthcare infrastructure, brought to light by the pandemic. It will be no small task, and its handling will have an impact on America for years to come. It will require a leader at HHS who has the trust of the public and the requisite healthcare experience. Unfortunately, those two factors are missing from the nomination of Attorney General Becerra.

In recovering from a once-in-a-century public health emergency, Americans need to have the confidence that our HHS Secretary understands the intricacies of healthcare policy and has an eye to the future as we improve upon our pre-pandemic vulnerabilities, protecting future generations from experiencing similar pandemic situations.

While Attorney General Becerra served on a healthcare-focused subcommittee as a U.S. Representative, he has no further experience in public health or medicine. He also lacks the executive experience that would be useful in running a complex executive branch Department like HHS, which is involved in the nationwide vaccine rollout and now the regulatory implementation of the recent \$1.9 trillion package.

The American people need to trust that their HHS Secretary will work for them, regardless of disagreements over ideology. Like a President, Cabinet officials work for the entire country, and broad public trust is essential. As Mr. Becerra was serving in his current role in California as attorney general, the Trump administration was making significant regulatory changes to protect the sanctity of life. Attorney General Becerra then spent much of his time attempting to overturn or ignore those changes.

Most recently, Attorney General Becerra actively defended a California law requiring abortion coverage in insurance plans offered by churches. The Office of Civil Rights at HHS ruled on January 24, 2020, that the State's abortion mandate violated Federal law, but Attorney General Becerra refused to comply.

Ideological or moral disagreements should not be met with legal challenges. Americans need to know that